

The Souris River Loop National Wildlife Refuges

Des Lacs NWR
J. Clark Salyer NWR
Upper Souris NWR



Vision & Goals
Workshop
Summary
Report

*Visioning for the
Souris River Loop Refuges*

Vision and Goals Workshop
January 14 - 15, 2003

Prepared by Region 6 Division of Refuge Planning
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Report Contents

North Dakota's Souris River Loop Refuges	1
Planning for the Souris River Loop Refuges ...	2
Developing the Vision and Goal Statements	3
Qualities & Issues	4
Planning Challenges	6
Looking into the future	8
A Draft Vision	8
The Draft Goals	9
The Slogan	10
The Next Steps	11

Workshop Participants

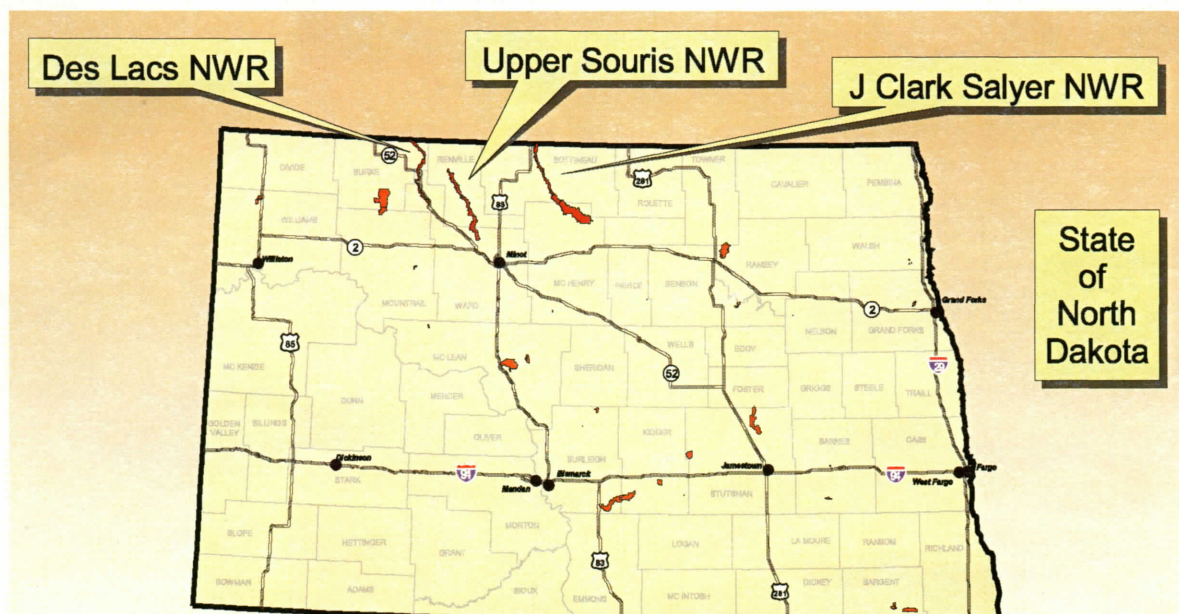
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North Dakota's Souris River Loop Refuges

Three National Wildlife Refuges lie within the Souris River basin of north central North Dakota: Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge (19,554 acres), J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge (58,700 acres), and Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge (32,092 acres). Collectively, these long, narrow, riverine refuges include significant examples of major biological communities of the northern Great Plains region - communities that harbor more than 300 species of migratory birds - as well as noteworthy cultural and historical elements. Biological communities common among the three refuges include green-ash-American elm woodlands within river floodplains and adjacent coulees; rolling to level, native mixed-grass prairie of the Drift Plain "drift prairie"; wet meadows; and riverine marsh impoundments. Des Lacs and Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuges also have deeper, open water impoundments, and J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge includes about 18,000 acres of sandhills prairie interspersed with aspen parkland.

In addition to sharing many natural resource features within the same river system, the three Souris River Loop Refuges have a fairly common management history and face many similar resource conservation issues and challenges. Thus, a collective perspective from all three refuges was used to conscientiously and efficiently generate a draft vision statement and goals that would equally serve all three or any one of the three while heeding the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System: "*. . . to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generation of Americans.*"

Individual refuges are important in and of themselves. They support resident, as well as migratory, wildlife and provide enjoyment for local people. But perhaps they are most important for their collective benefits. Together, they form a network of lands spanning the entire continent - supporting birds migrating from Alaska and Canada to the southern states and points south, providing for the conservation of trust resources and enjoyment for people throughout the United States and neighboring countries. For example, refuges in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana provide wetland and grassland habitats critical to breeding and migrating birds as required by International Treaties with Canada and Mexico. Refuges in Louisiana and Texas provide wintering habitat for these same birds. Still other refuges provide for endangered and threatened plants or animals that exist in unique habitats which occur in very few locations. And collectively, they help prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered by securing habitat in all or portions of a species range. The network is critical; a deficiency in one location may affect wildlife in other locations.



Planning for the Souris River Loop Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System's mission and goals and the Refuges' legislated purposes will provide the basis for developing the Comprehensive Conservation Plans for the Souris River Loop Refuges. A Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is a 15-year plan that will provide long-range guidance and management direction for each of the refuges. In summary, the CCP will:

- Outline a vision for the refuges
- Guide management decisions
- Outline goals, objectives and strategies to achieve the refuges' vision and purposes
- Provide other agencies and the public with an understanding of the management strategies to be implemented
- Describe the desired future condition of the refuges



Developing the Vision & Goal Statements

In January 2003, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff, representatives from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, North Dakota Wetland Habitat Office, USGS Biological Resources Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Three Affiliated Tribes convened for a Vision & Goals Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to:

- Give the Planning Team an opportunity to work together to explore the three refuges' management possibilities for the future and to educate one another about what's at stake.
- Develop vision and goal statements iteratively, giving all participants multiple opportunities to create, reflect on, and improve the working drafts.
- Generate a vision statement that is congruent with the Service's mission and values.
- Generate goal statements that reflect different aspects of the vision while providing a greater level of detail.
- Generate a slogan that can be used to capture the essence of the three refuges.
- Build a stronger team among the entities that will work on the three refuges over time.



The workshop provided a forum for Service staff and workshop participants to share information about the future of the Refuges and to exchange ideas about management strategies. The workshop participants began the visioning process by focusing on identifying the qualities and issues of the Refuges. The qualities and issues discussions led to the collective drafting of preliminary vision and goal statements for the Refuges which was accomplished using small and whole group visioning exercises. The workshop concluded with workshop participants creating and then voting on a slogan that could be used to capture the essence of the three Refuges.

Qualities & Issues

Qualities build upon the Refuges' purposes. They are the characteristics and features of the Refuges which make them special and worthy of refuge status. Issues are defined as management concerns that need to be addressed during the refuge planning process. Issue identification requires consideration of management challenges both within the Refuge and in relation to adjacent communities and the public.



Qualities of the Souris River Loop Refuges

The following were identified as important qualities of the Souris River Loop Refuges:

Natural Resource Qualities

- In combination, the three Refuges preserve a large component of the natural environment totaling over 110,200 acres
- The Refuges represent a comprehensive collection of all North Dakota plant communities
- The Refuges could be the only remaining representatives of the *drift plain prairie* which is considered a threatened resource
- All three Refuges are associated with a river and serve as a sediment trap for the Hudson Bay drainage
- The Souris and Des Lacs Rivers are a stable water supply
- The Refuges are located in a critical area of the Central Flyway which provides migratory and breeding habitat
- A rich diversity of birds (avifauna) use the Refuges
- The Refuges provide breeding habitat for more than 20 species endemic to the area
- The Refuges serve as research natural areas, contributing to the research of grassland birds



Cultural Resource Qualities

- A rich history of early exploration, paleohistory, settlement and post settlement exists in this area
- The Souris River basin has been a gathering spot for people and wildlife through time
- The Souris River basin is rich in Native American artifacts (tipi rings) and traditions
- The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) played a role in the original development of the three Refuges

Public Use Qualities

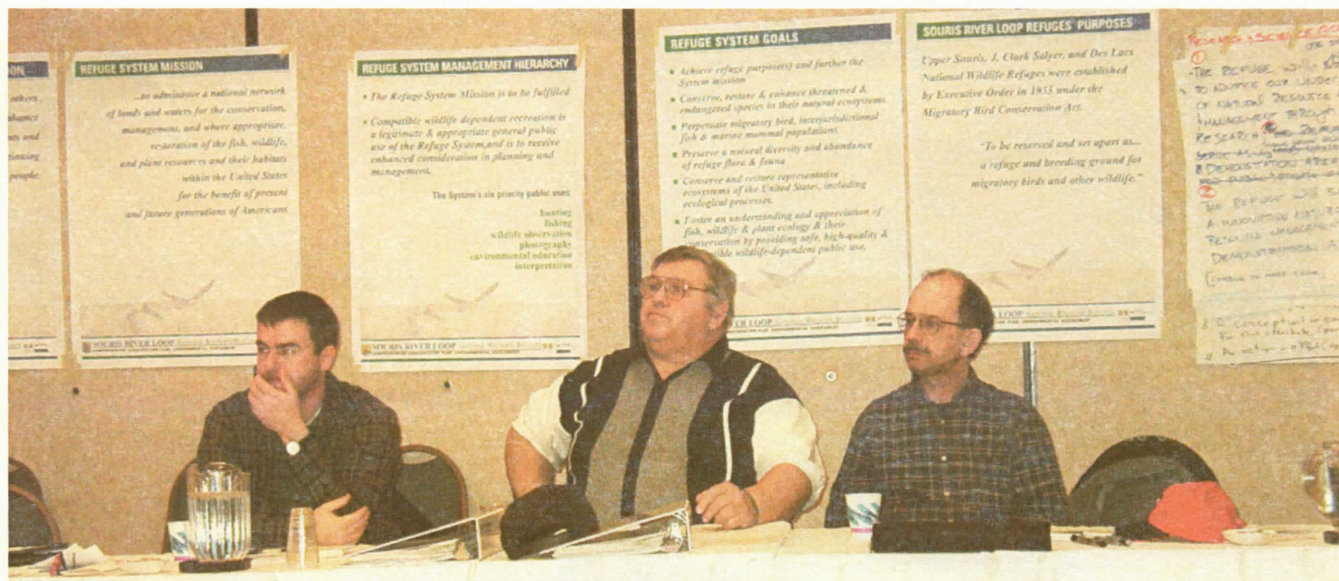
- The public is aware of and likes the Refuges on a statewide basis
- The Refuges are known for their recreational uses and scenic value
- The Refuges are known for educational opportunities
- The Upper Souris NWR is known as the best fishery in the Central North Dakota area

Site Qualities

- The Refuges are located in close proximity to the international (Canadian) boundary
- The Souris River is an international river
- The Refuges have the potential to contribute to regional water quality

Management Qualities

- The Refuges are multi-purpose in nature (e.g. wildlife conservation, flood control)
- The potential exists for a broad range of partnerships that are integral to every aspect of refuge management (i.e. hunting, education, research, fishing)



Planning Challenges [Issues]

The following were selected as important issues to be reviewed during the drafting of the vision and goal statements and the subsequent planning of the Refuges:

Natural Resources Issues

- Compromised ecological processes and the disturbance regimes that maintain prairie systems and processes (e.g. fire, herbivory, destroying nests, potential for fire to get away)
- Poor understanding, within the Service, of the need for intensive management in order to restore habitat
- Biologists need more information to gain a greater understanding about the systems we're entrusted to manage
- The spread of invasive species and woody vegetation on refuge and adjacent lands
- Wildlife population management
- Water Quality
- Air Quality

Cultural Resource Issues

- The protection of historical and cultural resources
- Need to consult with tribes whenever drilling or major development occurs to comply with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990
- Need understanding of Section 106 process and the laws for the collection of artifacts



Public Use Issues

- Visitor management with regard to recreational use and the increased centennial year advertising of the Refuge System
- The public would like to use snowmobiles and ATVs on the Refuges
- The public would like more environmental education programs at the Refuges
- Public pressure exists to increase the hunting and fishing programs at the Refuges
- Commercial guiding as a proposed use on the Refuges
- Increased demand for all uses on the Refuges

Partnership Issues

- In this sparsely populated area it is difficult to find partners

Management Issues

- Prescribed fire as a management tool, and public perception of the Refuges burning up trees and nesting habitat and creating smoke
- The drawing down of water pools is controversial with the public
- Predator control as a management tool is controversial
- Fossil fuel development and potential for contamination of the aquifer, point sources, emissions and degradation of the landscape
- Grazing and haying, as management tools, are controversial
- Managing wildlife diseases and protecting the health of the public and Service employees
- Mosquito control (West Nile Virus)
- Wind turbines and how they may affect migratory birds

Refuge Operations Issues

- Lack of resources to meet expectations of the planning process
- Lack of funds and staff to care for the Refuges
- Maintenance issues

Looking into the future . . .

A Vision

A vision is a future-oriented expression of what the Refuges' will be, or what the Service hopes to do, based primarily upon the Refuge System's mission and the Refuges' purposes. A vision statement explains the intentions of the Service's planning efforts. To be compelling, the Refuges' vision must specifically highlight the unique characteristics of the Refuges.



The DRAFT Souris River Loop Refuges Vision

From Paleo-Indians on the tails of the Ice Age; to the Assiniboine and Chippewa, early fur trappers, explorers, and naturalists; eminent bison herds and astoundingly abundant birdlife; fires stretching for miles to revitalize treeless prairie; determined homesteaders and vanquished farms of the Dust Bowl era

The Souris River basin figures prominently in the cultural and natural history of mid-continent North America's plains and prairies. Three National Wildlife Refuges of the Souris River "Loop" – Des Lacs, Upper Souris, and J. Clark Salyer – will conserve much of the ecology and natural character of the northern plains region while helping sustain populations of migratory birds and other wildlife native to the landscape. The refuges will create a sense of awe and wonder by providing an array of wildlife-dependent recreational and educational experiences that enhance visitor awareness of the splendid natural and cultural heritage of the northern plains. Functioning as integral parts of the ecosystems and human communities to which they belong, the Souris River Loop Refuges will seek collaborative partnerships to attain common goals. A diverse and passionate refuge workforce will rely on sound science to understand and restore or emulate natural processes essential to the integrity and perpetuation of major biological communities with which the refuges are entrusted.

The Goals

Goals are descriptive, open-ended, and often broad statements of desired future conditions that convey a purpose but do not define measurable units. A well-written goal directs work toward achieving the vision and purpose of the Souris River Loop Refuges. The goals drafted at the workshop refer specifically to the Souris River Loop Refuges. They outline approaches for managing the Refuges' resources and articulate what visitor experiences will be like in the future.

DRAFT Goals

1. Ecology

Provide the array of biotic communities present in the Souris River basin in the mid 1800s by restoring aspects of, or emulating, to the greatest extent possible, the dynamic processes (i.e. grazing, fire and drought) under which these communities evolved. The major communities include: drift prairie, sand hills prairie, prairie slopes, woody drains, riparian woodlands, aspen oak woodlands, seeded herbaceous cover, riverine marshes, lakes, prairie ponds, wet meadows, riparian.

2. Cultural Resources

The refuge will preserve prehistoric, Native American, and historic cultural resources.

3. Research & Science

The refuge will serve as a demonstration area for innovative natural resource management using sound science and applied research to advance the understanding of natural resource function and management within the Northern Great Plains.

4. Public Use, Education and Interpretation

The refuge will develop public appreciation for the National Wildlife Refuge System through an understanding of the Souris River biological communities and cultural resources by providing appropriate and compatible recreational, educational, and interpretive opportunities.

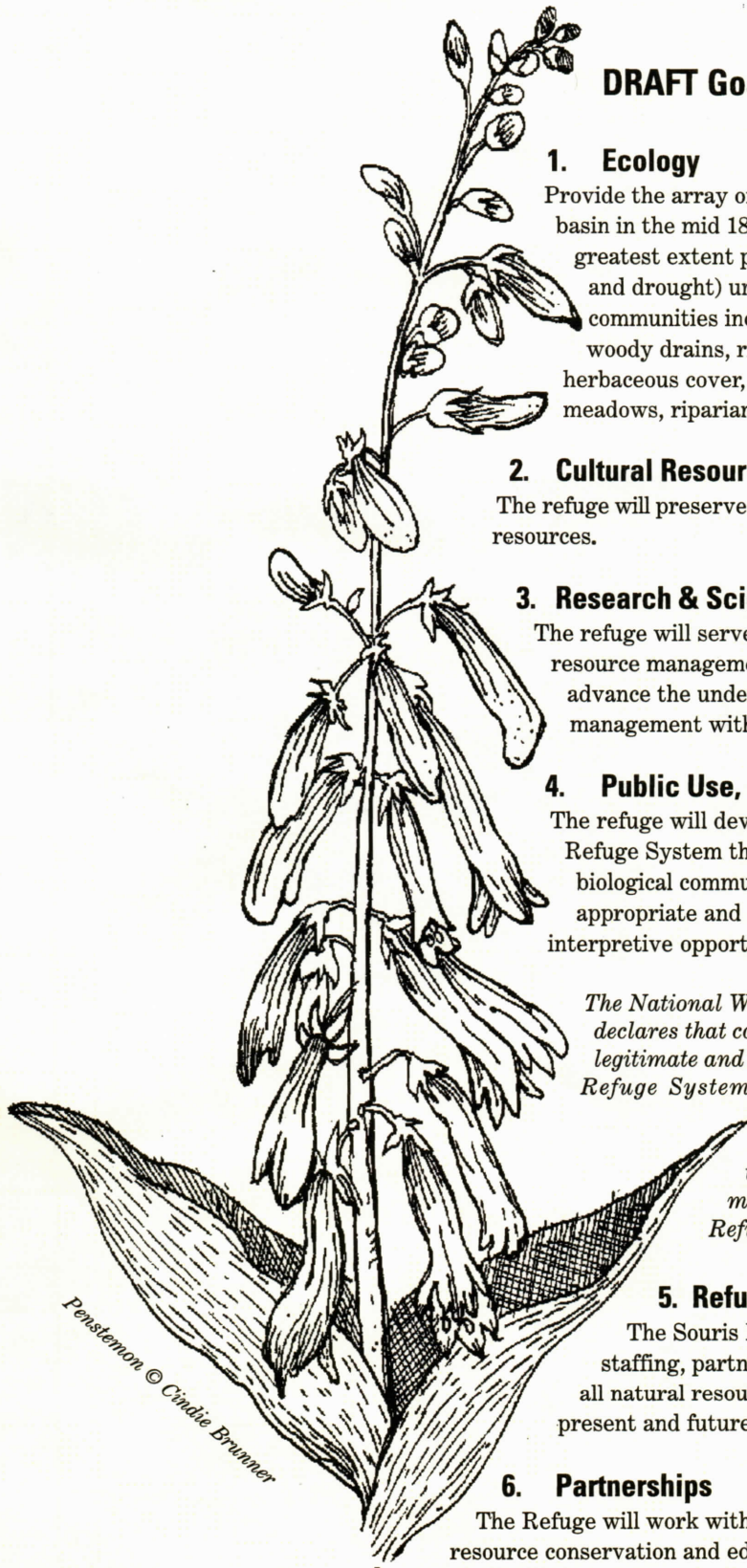
The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 declares that compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses are legitimate and appropriate, priority general public uses of the Refuge System. These six uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation) are to receive enhanced consideration, in planning and management, over all other general public uses of the Refuge System.

5. Refuge Operations

The Souris River Loop refuges will efficiently utilize funding, staffing, partnerships and volunteer programs for the benefit of all natural resources, the National Wildlife Refuge System, and present and future generations.

6. Partnerships

The Refuge will work with others on issues of mutual interest including resource conservation and education, compatible public use, wildlife-related research and infrastructure.



The Slogan

Workshop participants were asked to generate a slogan that could be used to capture the essence of the three refuges. Participants voluntarily submitted slogans for the team to vote on. The 'Voting by Dots' system was utilized, whereby each workshop participant was given eight 'voting dots' to be distributed in any combination among the proposed slogans. The slogan receiving the most dots cast in its favor was nominated as the winning slogan. And the winner is . . .

**"Souris River Loop Refuges
- *your prairie places*"**



The Next Steps

Engaging the public . . .

With a draft vision statement and a preliminary list of goals in hand, the CCP core production team will turn to the public for their input. The core team will conduct public scoping meetings in which they will educate the public about the CCP process and the Refuges' resources. The meetings will also provide a forum for the public to provide feedback on the draft vision statement and goals.

The Service is interested in learning more about the public's concerns and will encourage meeting participants and all other interested parties to expand on the issues and qualities lists. The public will be asked to share their ideas about what makes the Refuges an asset for their communities and how they think they should be managed in the future to serve both wildlife and people.

Planning for the future . . .

The next phase of the CCP process will focus on the development of alternative management strategies. After analyzing comments gathered during the public scoping phase, members of the Service staff, partnering agencies and the core production team will reconvene in order to develop several planning alternatives for the Refuges. Alternatives will address conservation techniques and Refuge management actions as well as compatible wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities.

When draft management alternatives have been produced, the core team will again turn to the public for their input. During an Alternatives Workshop, the Service will present the alternatives to the public and will solicit their feedback and ideas for the further refinement of the various strategies.

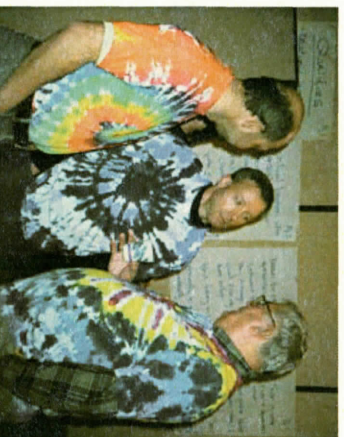
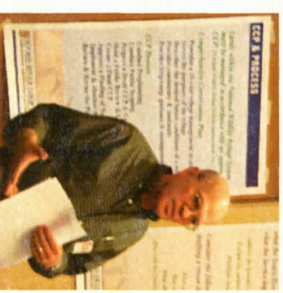
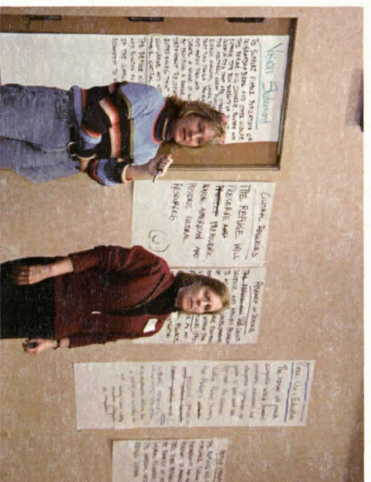
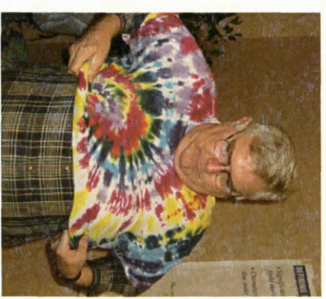
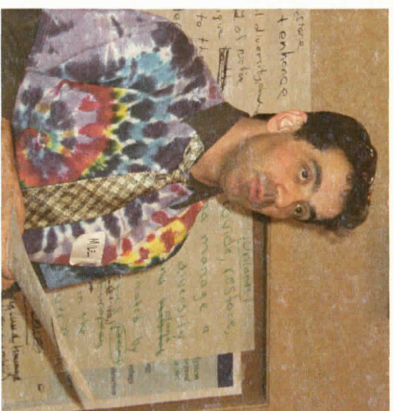
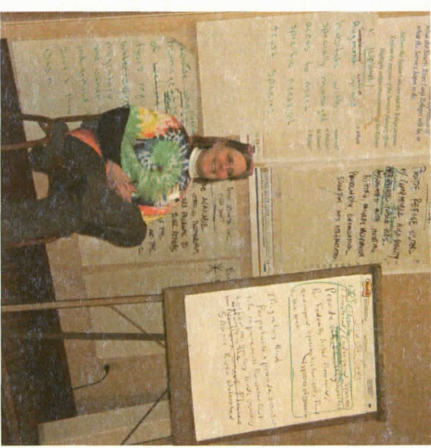
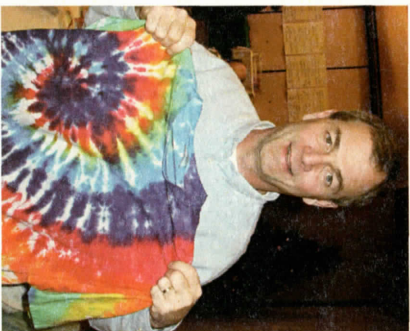
As the planning process unfolds over the next three years, the Service will return to the draft vision statement outlined in this document. While the statement today seems like a fair expression of what the Refuges will be like in the future and what it will offer visitors and wildlife, the vision of the Souris River Loop Refuges may continue to evolve over time. Public comments, innovative ideas and new partnerships will continue to shape the refinement of the vision statement and, in turn, guide the development of the CCP.

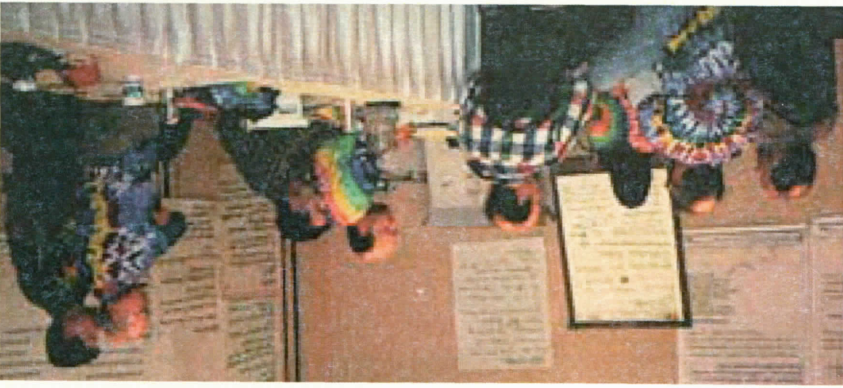
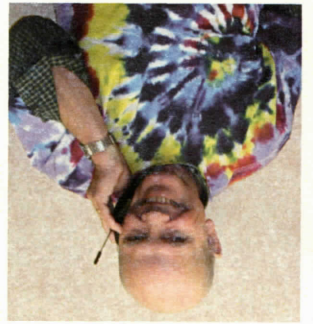
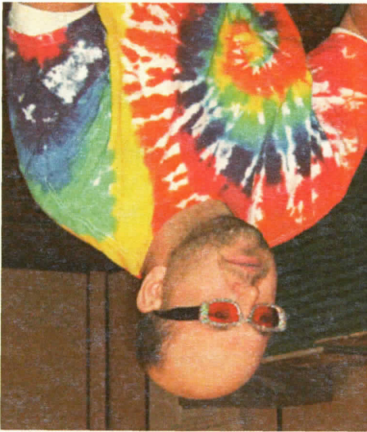
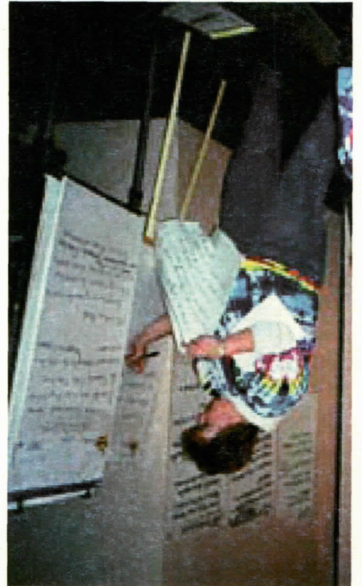
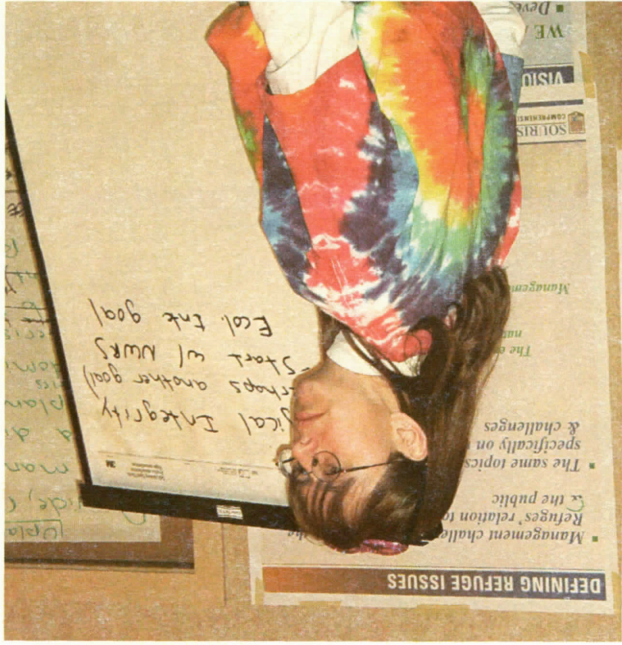
Project Schedule

Project Milestones and Delivery Dates are identified in the following table:

Planning Stage	Start Date	Estimated Completion
Preplanning	June 2002	September 2002
Draft Vision Statement and Goals	January 2003	January 2003
Public Involvement and Scoping	March 2003	August 2003
Develop and Analyze Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action	March 2003	February 2005
Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA Document	March 2005	October 2005
Final CCP, NEPA Document and Record of Decision	November 2005	February 2006

Workshop Participants and Highlights





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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

<http://www.fws.gov>

<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/planning>

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